

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Tricia Starks. *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008. 313 pp. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 978-0-299-22964-1.

It is hard to over-state the importance of a good survey and analysis of Soviet medicine from the experimental NEP years. The cultural experimentation of the period has been heavily studied and is well-understood by scholars such as Sheila Fitzpatrick, Lynn Mally, and Richard Stites.¹ On the medical side, a series of brilliant articles on the social hygienists in the 1980s and 1990s by Susan Gross Solomon led the way amongst contemporary scholars. Her work has since been joined by other studies of specific aspects of NEP medicine by Frances Bernstein, Eric Naiman, and others.² The field, however, has sorely needed a more general analysis.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the hygienists of the 1920s profoundly influenced the healthcare of most of the Soviet period, from the openly coercive medical surveillance of the later Stalinist years, to the dense post-Stalinist healthcare networks. Perhaps most importantly, the 1920s hygienists' work led to the Soviet people's internalization of hygienic ideas, if not so much hygienic practices. Making sense of later Soviet healthcare without a general analysis of NEP medicine has been needlessly challenging. With Starks' *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* in hand there will be much less frustration for post-NEP medical historians in the future.

There are even better reasons to celebrate the publication of *The Body Soviet*. The book is driven by discursive theory but, while many Soviet historians are informed by Foucault, Starks applies his approach with unusual rigor and consistency. Hygiene itself is redefined as not just cleanliness but as intimately tied to the civilizing desire for "order" as well as "consciousness" in a broad modern sense. In the classic Foucauldian manner, it becomes a set of discourses and practices that flows and freezes around everyone. Starks demonstrates this pervasiveness via the creation of the hygienic subject in Soviet thought and action. Starks departs from Solomon's focus on the social hygienists specifically, or even the medical profession overall, to identify a hygienist as anyone in the power structure who believed hygiene to be a good thing. We already knew Lenin to be prim but, in some of the most effective early passages in the book, his primness, and that of other Bolshevik leaders, is drawn more finely. Trotsky's threat that political enemies be consigned to the "dustbin of history" becomes more literal. The most striking example Starks gives of the influence of hygiene on the early Soviet authorities is their attitude towards the city. Despite the deep Bolshevik antipathy to the countryside as a place of cultural "darkness," the Bolshevik hygienists did not see the modern city primarily as its binary opposite, a place of enlightenment, but rather as one of overcrowding and filth.

Like the central theme of hygiene, the book's chapters are conceived abstractly, but proceed methodically from revolutionary utopianism through the state, city, home, and family, with the finale on the body itself. Below chapter level, those less enamoured of French post-structuralist theory may find this book a choppy read but still of tremendous insight and use. While Starks' overarching idea is simple, to demonstrate that NEP hygiene was a Foucauldian discourse, her survey of the array of hygienic measures taken by the Soviets in the 1920s is lavish indeed. This book is encyclopaedic in ambition and form. Although it has relatively few chapters, each is divided into many sections on discrete subjects where the connections of the hygiene discourse to everyday thought and practice are made clear. The sheer range of these is dazzling: I counted over sixty, from Red Corners in restaurants to Pioneers as budding hygienists. It is also a little dizzying at times. Thus, in the chapter on the home, we read, in as many pages, of childhood accident prevention, the raising of air quality, elimination of dust, anti-spitting, pro-sunlight, the kitchen and the bathroom each as hygienic projects. At the least, Starks provides an essential entrée for those who wish to study any of these subjects in more depth and her exposure of the more obscure facets of the hygienic project, for instance, the open-air "sanitary squares" set up in Soviet cities, is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the book. More than this, she does also provide lengthier analyses, for example, when the chapter on the home settles on the theme of women and the gendering of domestic work. Most importantly of all, the diversity of the subject-matter shows the scope and pervasiveness of the hygiene discourse.

Two hundred and ten pages of text illuminating solely the hygienists' project could be monotonous but Starks provides counter-points. Foucauldian discourses are closed worlds, endlessly self-reflective, with Starks herself emphasizing repeatedly that the hygiene project had little to do with Soviet reality of the 1920s. Although no attempt is made to give a coherent picture of actual hygienic conditions under NEP she does often offer glimpses of that reality. She contrasts Semashko's recommended living space of 55 cubic metres per person with the actual quantity in Moscow in the 1920 of just under one cubic metre (p. 131). Her second counter-point is the existence of what I shall call "anti-hygienists." In the Foucauldian world resistance to a pervasive discourse occurs only within frozen air pockets. For some under NEP, especially younger male party members, dirt smacked of the authentic revolution while cleanliness was bourgeois. There were female activists who opposed personal hygiene to escape the pervasive gendering of the discourse. There were workers who defended drinking and card-playing. One wishes to know more about these people but Starks tells us enough about them and actual Soviet conditions to frame her study properly. Her goal is therefore restrained as well as clear.

Starks draws lightly from the archives. Although she also does not often use statistics, when doing so she reads ambiguous numbers unambiguously. She interprets a 1922 survey from Petrograd as showing only small changes in childcare after visits by nurses even though a majority of mothers involved did change some important practices (p. 156). Although mothers who, according to the hy-

gienists, gave improper suckling dummies declined by only 6 percent and those who diapered improperly by just 12 percent, overall mothers who did not feed their children properly declined by 62 percent. Starks makes other odd statistical interpretations like this. Fortunately, they are marginal to her argument. She also relies more on scholarship on countries other than Russia and the Soviet Union, with the result that the Russian context is sometimes missing. To what extent, for instance, was NEP hygiene the product of the long-running alienation of the intelligentsia from the rest of Russian society?

This is nevertheless a very well-researched book. Starks uses a large number of Soviet published sources from the 1920s and the synthesis of scholarship on non-Soviet, Soviet and pre-revolutionary Russian topics, is tremendous. Dorothy Porter integrated Solomon's work on the social hygienists into the international development of healthcare in her *Health, Civilization, and the State* (London: Routledge, 1999). Starks pushes much further, presumably influenced by David Hoffmann, her mentor at Ohio State University, and his article arguing that the pro-natalism associated with Stalinism was also part of an interwar, international phenomenon. At every turn she engages with scholarship on similar phenomena in other countries. Although a work of Soviet history, her book serves, in part, as a comparative study as well. Starks persuades fully with the contextualizing of NEP hygiene internationally.

Her use of agitational hygiene plays as sources stands out but it is the visual sources, both photographs and posters, that are most notable of all. Readers will very much enjoy both her choice of NEP sanitary posters and her close analysis of them. The sheer variety of sources published in the 1920s contrasts with all other Soviet periods, except the *glasnost'* years. To her additional credit, Starks has made good use of this NEP diversity, shaping her project around it. Yet the wonder of *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* is, for an author's *first* book, its sweep, synthesis, and analysis. Reading it is exhilarating.

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